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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNHRC](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS DECRY EGYPT'S
UNHRC CANDIDATURE

REF: A. CAIRO 1381
[1](#)B. GENEVA 0513

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A COALITION OF 19 EGYPTIAN HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS HAS PROTESTED THE GOE'S CANDIDACY FOR MEMBERSHIP (REFTELS) IN THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (UNHRC) AND EXPRESSED "AMAZEMENT" AT WHAT IT ALLEGED WERE "FALSIFICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S TRUE STANCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS" INCLUDED IN EGYPT'S APPLICATION. THE GOE HAS NOT ISSUED A PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE NGOS STATEMENT. AN MFA OFFICIAL HAS PRIVATELY TOLD US THAT THE GOE IS UNCONCERNED BY THE CRITICISM. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) IN A MAY 14 PRESS STATEMENT, THE 19 NGOS (LISTED IN PARA 7) CALLED ON ALL MEMBER STATES OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO UPHOLD THEIR COMMITMENTS EXPRESSED UPON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, WHICH REQUIRE THAT THEY TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD OF THE NOMINATED STATES WHEN ELECTING ITS MEMBERS AND ARGUED THAT THE CREDIBILITY AND COMPETENCE OF THE UNHRC DEPENDS ON ELECTING MEMBERS WITH A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS AND COMMITMENTS. ACCORDING TO THE COALITION'S PRESS STATEMENT, "INCORPORATING STATES THAT ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR SEVERE HOSTILITY TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS, THEIR BLATANT FLOUTING OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND NON-COOPERATION WITH THE UNHR TREATY BODIES AND ITS SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS WOULD UNDERMINE THE CREDIBILITY OF THE COUNCIL... (AND) WOULD HAMPER ITS ROLE IN IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS, NOT ONLY IN THE ARAB REGION BUT ALSO WORLDWIDE." THE STATEMENT ALSO CRITICIZED THE INFRINGEMENT OF "THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IN THE LAST FEW YEARS ON LEGISLATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AS WELL AS THEIR PRACTICES THAT FLY IN THE FACE OF THE MOST BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS PRINCIPLES AND VALUES."

[1](#)3. (SBU) THE COALITION STATEMENT FURTHER ARGUED THAT REPORTS BY EGYPTIAN NGOS, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, AND UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEES AND UN HUMAN RIGHTS RAPPORTEURS, ALL "PLACE EGYPT AMONG THE WORST STATES FOR DISREGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS. THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT'S RECORD IS FULL OF SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN PRACTICED WIDELY FOR LONG YEARS."

[1](#)4. (SBU) THE COALITION STATEMENT LISTS TEN POINTS THAT CHALLENGE THE GOE'S STATED COMMITMENT (REF B) TO PROTECTING AND EXPANDING HUMAN RIGHTS.

(BEGIN VERBATIM LIST OF TEN POINTS)

FIRST: THE PERSISTENCE OF BRUTAL TORTURE IN THE VARIOUS PLACES OF DETENTION, AND THE IMPUNITY OF PERPETRATORS OF TORTURE ESPECIALLY IN POLITICAL CASES. BOTH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS (INCLUDING THE UNITED NATIONS CAT) HAVE PREVIOUSLY REAFFIRMED THAT TORTURE IN EGYPT HAS BECOME A SYSTEMATIC AND ROUTINE PRACTICE.

SECOND: THE PERSISTENCE OF ARBITRARY DETENTION, GIVEN THE CONTINUED STATE OF EMERGENCY SINCE 1981. THE NUMBERS OF DETAINEES ARE CONSIDERED TO BE IN THE THOUSANDS, SOME OF THEM HAVE BEEN DETAINED (WITHOUT BEING CHARGED OR TRIED) FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS.

THIRD: TRYING CIVILIANS BEFORE MILITARY COURTS AND DENYING THEM THEIR RIGHT TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE A COMPETENT JUDGE. THIS INCLUDED REFERRING A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT OF THE OPPOSITION TO MILITARY TRIAL AND SENTENCING HIM FOR ONE YEAR IN PRISON BECAUSE OF HIS EXPRESSED OPINIONS.

FOURTH: HARASSING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND RESTRICTING THEIR ACTIVITIES. THE LATEST OF SUCH INSTANCES TOOK PLACE A FEW DAYS AGO WHEN THE OFFICES OF THE CENTRE FOR TRADE UNION AND WORKER SERVICES WERE SHUT DOWN. PREVIOUSLY, THE OFFICE OF THE EL-NADIM CENTRE FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REHABILITATION OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE AND VIOLENCE WERE BROKEN INTO AND SEARCHED. THIS IS IN ADDITION TO THE DAILY AND HEAVY-HANDED INTERVENTIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE AFFAIRS OF NGOS. SUCH INTERVENTIONS INCLUDE VETOING NOMINEES TO THEIR BOARDS OF DIRECTORS, DENYING THEM PERMISSION TO RECEIVE FOREIGN GRANTS OR ACCEPT LOCAL DONATIONS, AND REFUSING TO REGISTER NEW NGOS. LATELY THE MINISTRY MADE PUBLIC THEIR INTENTION TO MAKE YET MORE RESTRICTIVE AMENDMENTS TO THE AUTHORITARIAN LAW ON ASSOCIATIONS CURRENTLY IN FORCE.

FIFTH: WIDENING THE SCOPE OF CRIMINALISATION IN CASES INVOLVING OPINION AND PUBLICATION, AND UPHOLDING THE CUSTODIAL PENALTIES IN SUCH CASES. THIS HAS LED LATELY TO ISSUING A PRISON SENTENCE AGAINST AN EGYPTIAN PRODUCER AT AL-JAZEERA CHANNEL WHO MADE A DOCUMENTARY EXPOSING TORTURE IN EGYPT. ALSO, AN EGYPTIAN BLOGGER WAS SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS IN PRISON UNDER THE CHARGE OF DERISION OF RELIGION AND INSULTING THE PRESIDENT, IN THE CONTEXT OF A WIDER HARASSMENT OF BLOGGERS CARRIED OUT BY THE SECURITY SERVICES. THIS IS IN ADDITION TO A NUMBER OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS WHO CURRENTLY STAND BEFORE COURT FOR THEIR ALLEGED INSULT OF THE PRESIDENT.

SIXTH: THE CONTINUED RIGGING OF ELECTIONS AND DOCTORING THE RETURNS OF REPRESENTATIVE ELECTIONS AND POPULAR REFERENDUMS, AS WELL AS PUNISHING JUDGES WHO EXPOSED THE RIGGING. MOREOVER, THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS PASSED BY THE GOVERNMENT LAST MONTH WILL ENABLE MORE OF THE SAME MANIPULATION OF THE WILL OF THE ELECTORATE.

SEVENTH: SUPPRESSING THE RIGHT TO PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION AND ASSEMBLY, WHICH WAS EPITOMISED IN THE SAVAGE MASSACRE OF THE SUDANESE REFUGEES WHO HAD ORGANISED A SIT-IN IN ONE OF THE SQUARES OF CAIRO IN DECEMBER 2005. THE ATTACK ON THE REFUGEES CLAIMED THE LIVES OF AROUND THIRTY OF THEM. THE UNITED NATIONS HAS RECENTLY CALLED FOR AN INQUIRY INTO THIS MASSACRE, AND THE GOVERNMENT REFUSED. THERE IS ALSO THE EXAMPLE OF THE PHYSICAL ASSAULT AND BLATANT SEXUAL HARASSMENT USED AGAINST FEMALE DEMONSTRATORS AND JOURNALISTS WHO WERE PROTESTING AGAINST THE AMENDMENTS OF THE CONSTITUTION IN 25 MAY 2005. THESE EVENTS, DOCUMENTED BY HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS, CONSTITUTE THE BASIS OF A CASE THAT IS CURRENTLY BEING EXAMINED BY THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES, RIGHTS.

EIGHTH: AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION LAST MARCH IN A WAY AS TO ALLOW THE SECURITY SERVICES TO FREE THEIR HANDS FROM THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES THAT PROTECT THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM AND SECURITY OF PERSON, PROHIBIT BREAKING INTO AND SEARCHING HOMES WITHOUT A JUDICIAL WARRANT, PROTECT THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY, AND PROHIBIT SURVEILLANCE OF MAIL AND TAPPING PHONE CALLS. IN THIS WAY THE NEW AMENDMENTS ENTRENCH THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE POLICE STATE.

NINTH: INCREASING PRESSURES ON THE FREEDOM OF BELIEF, AND THE RISE IN DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES BASED ON RELIGION THAT ARE SOMETIMES BASED ON CONSTITUTIONAL OR LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS OR COURT RULINGS.

TENTH: INCREASING PRESSURES ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY AND WIDENING THE SCOPE OF EXCEPTIONAL COURTS, ESPECIALLY MILITARY COURTS, WHICH ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE EXECUTIVE.

(END VERBATIM LIST OF NGO ARGUMENTS AGAINST EGYPT'S CANDIDACY)

15. (SBU) THE COALITION STATEMENT CONCLUDES BY NOTING THAT THE "UNDERSIGNED NGOS REALISE THAT THE CHANCES OF MAKING AN OBJECTIVE CHOICE FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL FROM AMONG THE ARAB COUNTRIES ARE ALMOST NONEXISTENT, GIVEN THAT MOST OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THOSE COUNTRIES, PERHAPS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MOROCCO, LEBANON AND MAURITANIA, ARE CONSIDERED AMONG THE WORST IN THE WORLD IN THEIR DISREGARD OF HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS. DESPITE THE DIFFICULTIES THAT THIS WILL INVOLVE FOR THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, WE BELIEVE THAT VOTING FOR THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD IMPLY AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR IT AND SIMILAR GOVERNMENTS TO PERSIST IN THEIR PRACTICES AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS."

16. (SBU) THE GOE HAS NOT ISSUED ANY FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE COALITION STATEMENT. AN MFA OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND MULTILATERAL ISSUES TOLD US ON MAY 15 THAT THE GOE IS NOT CONCERNED BY THE STATEMENT BY THE NGOS; THAT GROUPS SUCH AS THESE ARE ENGAGED IN "SELLING INFORMATION" TO BESMIRCH EGYPT'S REPUTATION; THAT THE GOE HAS "EVERY QUALIFICATION" TO BE A MEMBER OF THE UNHRC; AND THAT IT EXPECTS TO SUCCEED IN ITS EFFORT TO WIN A SEAT.

17. (SBU) THE 19 NGOS THAT SIGNED THE STATEMENT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING GROUPS. AT LEAST NINE OF THE 19 ORGANIZATIONS ARE PAST OR CURRENT RECIPIENTS OF USAID OR MEPI FUNDING FOR THEIR WORK ON DEMOCRACY AND/OR HUMAN RIGHTS.

--THE CAIRO INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES.

--THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF PRISONERS.

--THE ARAB PENAL REFORM ORGANIZATION.

--THE HISHAM MUBARAK LAW CENTER.

--THE ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LEGAL AID.

--THE ARABIC NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION.

--THE EGYPTIAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION ENHANCEMENT.

--THE NEW WOMAN ASSOCIATION.

--THE CENTER FOR TRADE UNION AND WORKERS' SERVICES.

--THE NADIM CENTRE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY AND REHABILITATION OF THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE.

--THE EGYPTIAN ORGANIZATION AGAINST TORTURE.

--THE HABIB CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS.

--THE ARAB PROGRAM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS.

--THE LAND CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.

--THE SHUMUU ASSOCIATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, CARE OF THE DISABLED, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

--THE ANDALUS INSTITUTE FOR TOLERANCE AND ANTI-VIOLENCE STUDIES.

--THE EGYPTIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC
DEVELOPMENT.

--THE CENTER FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT STUDIES.

--THE GROUP FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT.
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